

Epping Forest Transport Strategy

proposals 2009 – 2016



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Foreword

The challenges posed by increased housing, rising car ownership and the increase in congestion are not unique to Epping Forest or Essex as a whole. Sustainable travel can have an important part of the environment of the Epping Forest and in all of our daily lives.

Essex County Council wishes to improve the transport network in and around the Forest to help improve the Forest environment. Users need to be aware that Epping Forest is a special and unique place, and we hope to encourage more and more people to consider both sustainable transport alternatives as well as providing a safer and more accessible environment.

The Epping Forest Transport Strategy contains a series of realistic and sustainable measures to reduce the impact of traffic and to begin to address the better protection of the Forest landscape. This does not, for the main, mean large-scale, expensive changes to the road infrastructure; instead it offers a package of inter-related measures that aims to restore some of the rural character to the roads in and around the Forest and make roads more Forest-centric.

The Forest Transport Strategy is just one way Essex County Council is working in partnership with the City of London and the surrounding London Boroughs to ensure that the Epping Forest is maintained and improved for people to enjoy, now and in the future.

Councillor Norman Hume
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation
Essex County Council



Epping Forest is a unique and special place in Europe. All of us in Essex and London should be very proud that such a site has been successfully protected as a site open to all in one of the most densely-populated areas of Europe and next to one of the world's largest cities. Inevitably, as London and its conurbations have grown so have the levels of traffic. Although the car has provided individual freedom for people to explore and access more places of interest, the growing amount of traffic is having adverse affects on the fabric of those very places. None more so than Epping Forest, the elongated shape of which has made it especially vulnerable to fragmentation, noise and pollution. Once-small tracks through the Forest are now major highways which act to

sever its landscape, damage its wildlife habitats and spoil visitors' enjoyment of its tranquillity and open space.

The diversity of the Forest landscape and its flora and fauna is the result of centuries of sustainable traditional management. One of the traditions has been low-intensity grazing by cattle belonging to the commoners of the Forest. The future of this traditional form of management, important to the Forest's landscape character, is threatened by the levels of traffic. Currently the City of London, as Conservators of Epping Forest, is attempting to re-establish traditional grazing and ensure its future. The Conservators are also working with the local authorities around the Forest to raise the profile of this special landscape. It makes this a very exciting time for the Forest. To help protect this special environment we need others to share our excitement and to persuade everyone who drives through or visits the Forest to consider changes to the way they travel and how they view the Forest's roads.

I look forward to seeing the very real difference it makes to our current generation of visitors.

Mrs Wendy Mead

**Chairman of Epping Forest and Commons Committee
City of London Corporation**



Introduction to Epping Forest

Epping Forest is owned and managed by the City of London as The Conservators of Epping Forest. It is London's and Essex's largest public open space stretching 13 miles from Manor Park in East London to near Harlow in Essex and covers more than 2,450 hectares (6,000 acres). The Forest is visited by hundreds of thousands of people each year and provides a unique experience for thousands of school-children using its field centres.

The Forest is also the largest single ancient woodland site in the south-east England and contains more ancient trees than any other site in the UK. Its outstanding importance for wildlife has been recognised by its notification as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and its designation in 2005 as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or *Natura 2000* site – a site of European importance.



Why Do We Need a Transport Strategy?

The volume of traffic, its pollution, noise and speed, already reduce the enjoyment of visitors to this important open space and they have adverse impacts on the wildlife of Epping Forest too. The problem is set to grow, given the development pressures around London and Essex, particularly from the Thames Gateway and the M11 corridor. In the recent Quality of Life report on the Forest, *“What Matters and Why in Epping Forest”* (March 2003), a “worst reality” future for the Forest was envisaged with increasing fragmentation from roads and with development potentially encircling the Forest and cutting it off from its surrounding countryside. All the local authority partners and the Conservators of Epping Forest agreed that we needed to act now to prevent this happening and the Forest becoming “land-locked” in a heavily developed and road-dominated landscape.

Fragmentation

Epping Forest, large though it is, is fragmented by roads and some of these are amongst the busiest roads in Essex. In the region of 45,000 vehicles pass through the Wake Arms roundabout in the heart of the Forest each weekday, with tens of thousands of vehicles travelling up and down the other roads. The traffic volumes threaten the air quality for people and plants. The speed of traffic can reduce the enjoyment of an outing in the Forest on foot, bicycle or horse, especially with children, because of the difficulties of crossing busy roads and the constant noise and pollution.

Air pollution

The Conservators of Epping Forest recently co-sponsored a 3 year PhD research project by Imperial College examining the levels of car exhaust pollutants (nitrogen dioxide and ammonia) across a wide area of the Forest. An excess input of nitrogen can alter plant nutrition and biology, soil chemistry and encourage pests and pathogens. Concentrations in the air at most roadside locations were found to exceed, sometimes up to 3 times higher, the internationally-recommended limits above which plant health is threatened,. These elevated levels extended as far as 20 m from the main roads. This equated to approximately 4% of Forest land in Essex. Furthermore, the quantities of nitrogen entering the ecosystem via soil, vegetation and water, exceed an internationally-recognised threshold for potentially-damaging impacts, known as the Critical Load, across the whole of the Forest.



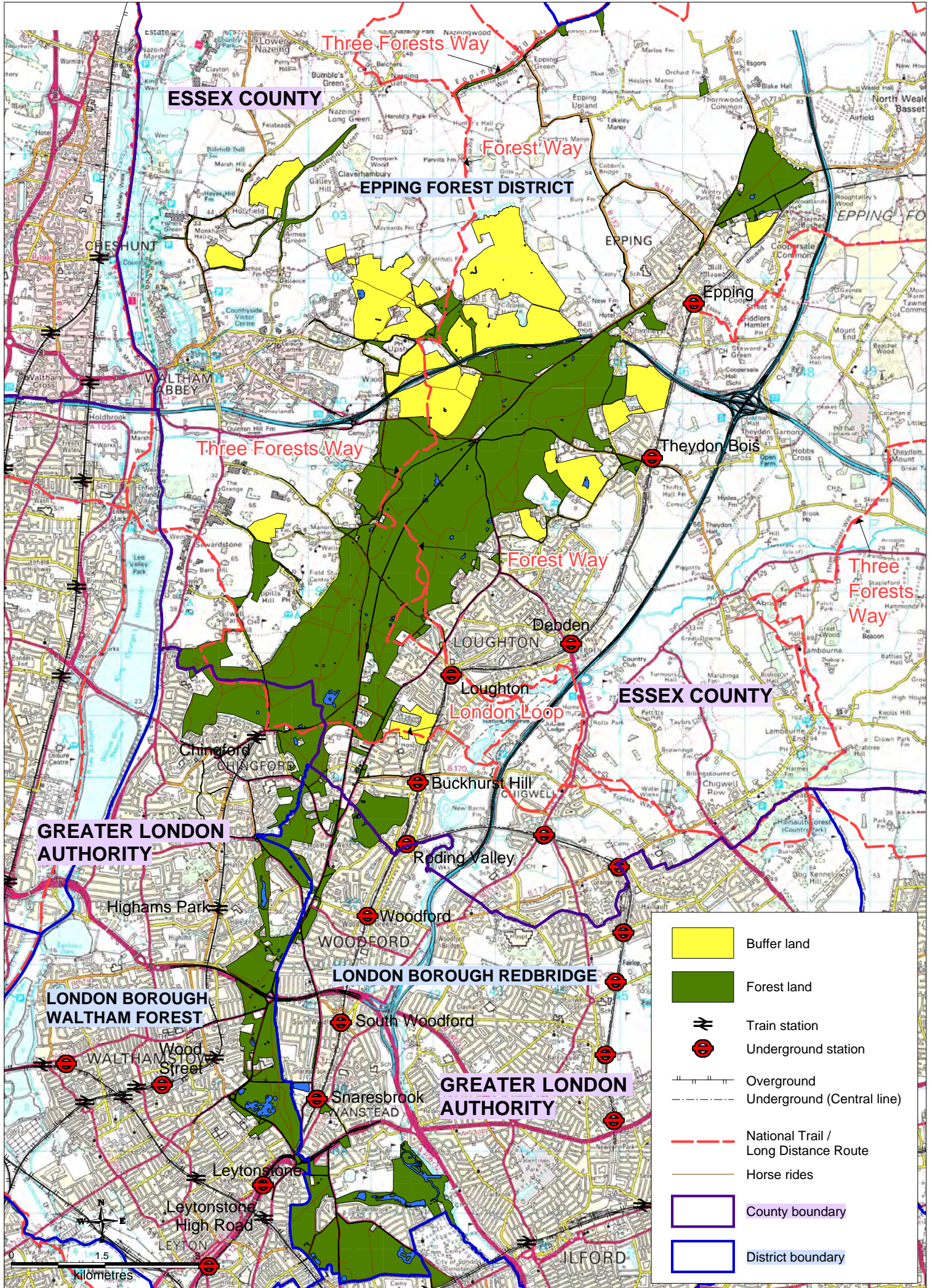


The impact on Forest plants is already apparent. For more than a century lichens have been used as sensitive natural indicators of air pollution: an early-warning system and a measure of improvement since the days of the deadly London smogs. Now traffic pollution is directly implicated in the changes in the composition of lichen communities across Epping Forest. Two separate studies by Imperial College, London have demonstrated that the number of lichen species are reduced close to roads and only a few pollution-tolerant ones survive. For Epping Forest continued nitrogen pollution is likely to mean adverse impacts on its natural habitats, especially its unique ancient trees and heathlands.

Key aims

The fundamental aim of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy is to make the Forest central to the way in which decisions are made on future transport and highways developments within and around its borders. In the long-term the aims are to reduce fragmentation of the Forest for visitors and wildlife alike, to improve air quality, to enhance recreational enjoyment of the landscape, to allow integrated conservation management including the exercise of ancient grazing rights and to encourage the use of sustainable and public transport options for visitors to the area.

Figure 1: Area covered by Epping Forest Transport Strategy



How did we get here?

In 1999 the Superintendent of Epping Forest, John Besent, delivered a public lecture on the changes to the Forest environment during the 20th Century. He raised his concerns for the Forest's future which centred, in particular, on the threats from roads and development. He called for a plan of action. Following this the Conservators set up a Forest Liaison Group chaired by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and made up of officers from local authorities around the Forest and other statutory agencies like English Nature (now also part of Natural England).

The Forest Liaison Group considered many of the key issues and concerns and its deliberations resulted in the commissioning of a *Quality of Life Capital* assessment from experienced consultants. The work involved detailed interviews with individuals with long associations with the Forest and many focus groups and workshops on different issues and right across the Forest parishes and districts. The QoLC report, funded by all the partners, was published in 2003 and it set out a vision for the Forest and a list of key actions. Amongst the most pressing needs identified was for a Forest-wide Transport Strategy to create gateways, increase the availability of public transport and access without a car and to reduce the impact of traffic and roads within the Forest.

A step change in management of the Forest

The Conservators and Essex County Council Highways agreed to act and committed themselves to developing a Forest Transport Strategy. In 2004 a stakeholders meeting was held by Essex County Council (Highways) inviting many local groups and all local authorities to contribute ideas and suggest priorities. Since then the development of the strategy has been an ongoing process, resulting in 2008 in the Forest Transport Strategy, in parallel with the Conservators' *Branching Out* project. Both strategic elements together seek to make the "step change" in the management and infrastructure required to protect the unique Forest environment as a functioning landscape rather than as mere fragments of countryside in a sea of urban and sub-urban development.

The Epping Forest Transport Strategy Vision

The Conservators' vision for Epping Forest includes the aims:

“Epping Forest’s position as a unique and ancient landscape for people and wildlife will be strengthened;

The Forest will retain its natural aspect with the diversity of wildlife habitats enhanced and the features of international importance, including its veteran pollards, protected;

The role of Epping Forest as a special place for recreation and relaxation will increase in importance with improved recreational opportunities;

Epping Forest will be highly valued as part of a larger and fully accessible protected landscape area”

Essex County Council shares this vision for Epping Forest and sees the Forest Transport Strategy as a step towards enhancing the protection of the Forest and ensuring its long-term value to people as a unique landscape.

A Strategy is needed to ensure a joined-up approach to managing and reducing the impacts of traffic across the Forest, both in Essex and London, and to promoting more sustainable ways of visiting and travelling through the Forest. The Strategy aims to ensure that the Forest’s importance as an open space for recreation and for wildlife is protected for the future.

Epping Forest Transport Strategy Objectives

- A Forest-centric approach in the formulation of transport proposals, reflecting the unique characteristics and international importance of the Forest environment.
- Providing improved accessibility to the Forest for all users especially those arriving by public transport or on foot, bicycle or horse-back.
- To reduce the visual impact of roads and fragmentation of the Forest landscape where possible through reconsidering the functions of the local road network, its infrastructure and design.
- To enhance road safety and reduce severance by improving crossing points for all users across the Forest
- To protect the ancient rights of grazing and intercommonage
- To support and integrate with the conservation management of the Forest.

Making it Happen – working together

Essex County Council (ECC) is working in partnership with the Conservators of the Epping Forest and the London Boroughs of Redbridge and Waltham Forest to devise a transport strategy to reduce the adverse impacts of roads and traffic on the Forest environment.

The primary aim of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy (EFTS) is to investigate and identify options in order to improve safety and accessibility for Epping Forest users, to reduce adverse environmental impacts on the forest area and to assist the Conservators in re-establishing commoners' cattle grazing.

A draft transport strategy was prepared in 2004 after discussion with many local Forest groups and this has subsequently been developed in further detail. A range of measures have been considered and will be prioritised via the current Essex Local Transport Plan (LTP 2) and in the future LTP 3, which runs from 2009 to 2015.

In parallel with this process the Conservators have been putting together a project, named *Branching Out*, which amongst other aspects seeks to create entrances or 'gateways' to the Forest, some of which would involve cattle grids. These 'gateways' and grids proposals, therefore, form some of the earliest priorities for the Forest Transport Strategy. Financial support for these features is being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other partners.

Public consultation

There will be a full public consultation on the Strategy during the next few months to re-examine the key issues that were raised by stakeholder groups in 2004. The consultation will also seek responses on the range of proposals contained in the Action Plan outlined below.

Implementation of the Forest Transport Strategy will be carried out in phases and as budgets allow. An outline of the elements in the action plan for the next 5 – 10 years is set out in the next section below.

Transport Strategy Action Plan

Introduction

The Epping Forest Transport Strategy proposals fall into 5 key areas. The following proposals form a strong framework for action over the next few years to deliver the Strategy objectives. All of these schemes will be considered by Essex County Council for funding based on an assessment of priorities each year but aimed at achieving a step change over the next decade in the ways in which people travel to and through the Forest. Most of the proposed measures are shown in Figures 2 and 3, although some are in locations not covered (e.g. Epping town, Lower Forest) or concern proposals that cannot be mapped (e.g. speed limit changes).

1. Improving the Forest Environment

The Forest needs to be noticed as a unique and special landscape which the transport infrastructure must play its role in protecting. The key to changing the perceptions of those travelling through the Forest is to make a clear statement of the Forest's identity and to assert the ancient rights that the Forest preserves and protects. 'Gateways' will be established that help to provide an identity across the 10 square miles of Forest area. Cattle Grids at some gateways will help to slow traffic speeds and help to protect the ancient grazing rights. A range of management proposals will include:

- ❑ **'Gateways'**. Positioning of 'gateways' at key entry locations to the Forest, including at the sites for the cattle grids. Such a scheme would aim to make it clear that the Forest is a zone, and a special area. Not all 'gateways' are shown in Figures 2 and 3 because 'gateways' are also proposed for the Epping and Bell Common areas. For 'gateways' with grids (see below), provision will be made for cyclists, horse riders and carriages to pass through the grid locations as conveniently and easily as possible using the most up-to-date layout and design of by-pass gates.
- ❑ **Gateway names – 'hatches'**. Many centuries ago Epping Forest had gates across its track-ways to prevent cattle leaving the common grazing land. These were named "hatches", an Anglo-Saxon term, and this historic feature of the Forest survives in modern place-names like Chingford Hatch (in the London Borough of Waltham Forest) and Aldborough Hatch (London Borough of Redbridge). The Forest Transport Strategy would like to re-introduce names to the entrances and modern-day 'gateways' of the Forest to help orientate new visitors and emphasise the historic importance of the Forest landscape. In Figures 2 and 3 some possible names are given to the proposed 'gateways' but it is proposed that the local communities should be invited to propose names for each one around the Forest.
- ❑ **Forest-specific signage**. Comparisons with other areas, such as the New Forest, Dartmoor and Cannock Chase that rely on a clear zone approach with the minimum of street clutter, would inform the decision making process for road signage.



An artist's impressions showing a main 'gateway' with signage at Chingford, at Rangers Road just below the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge



A photomontage of a proposed cattle grid location at the eastern end of Rangers Road, Essex near the junction with the A104 (looking west along Rangers Road). The photomontage shows the bypass gate and access track along the left-hand-side.

- ❑ **Cattle Grids.** Installation of cattle grids is proposed at selected locations to assist the Conservators with the reintroduction and extension of cattle grazing in the Forest. The selected locations are shown in Figure 2. The cattle grids themselves are also intended to act as part of a ‘gateway’ encouraging traffic to slow down, for drivers to change the way they drive through the Forest and to demarcate the Forest as a special highways area or zone. In addition to the public consultation on this Strategy document, the finalised details of the cattle grids will be subject to a further period of statutory public consultation as funding becomes available.



- ❑ **Road surface maintenance.** When roads are re-surfaced consideration will be given to the use of road surfaces that produce lower noise levels than standard. Also sympathetic colouring of any crossing point or anti-skid surfacing materials will be considered to ensure that it is in keeping with the rural nature of the forest and its landscape importance. In addition consideration will be given to minimising road markings wherever possible, especially on the minor Forest roads.

2. Route Management

We aim to slow and reduce the traffic passing through the Forest, to make the roads safer for everyone, especially the more vulnerable road users and Forest visitors crossing the roads. Measures would include:

❑ **Road Network Assessment:**

- Review of selected roads to evaluate their hierarchical classification which could reduce the opportunity for drivers to cut through the Forest. This could include Fairmead Road and Wake Road.
- Consideration of closures of part of the road network around the Conservation Centre (Nursery Road).

❑ **Traffic calming zones.** Refurbishment of existing traffic calming measures, especially the speed humps and fencing located at High Beach. Any modifications to the infrastructure would be in keeping with the rural nature to the Forest environment, but must remain fit for purpose. Zoning would ensure the reduction in signage and this may be one way to lower the visual impact of any speed reduction and traffic calming measures within the Forest.

❑ **Quiet Lanes.** Consideration of “quiet lanes” status for roads around High Beach (e.g. Mott Street – see Figure 2) and northern boundaries (e.g. Fernhall Lane and Long Street – *not* shown on maps) of the Forest and its buffer lands. “Quiet Lanes” require close liaison and agreement with local communities and would have a separate consultation process should the idea be developed further. “Quiet lanes” could help provide links for cyclists, horse-riders and walkers to the countryside around the Forest and, in particular, to the Lea Valley Regional Park a neighbouring site of high recreational importance. Such lanes could support the move towards more sustainable modes of access (see Section 5 below).

❑ **HGV routes.** Essex County Council is working on a freight movement/Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) strategy and will be working with key transport operators as well as Global Positioning System (GPS) providers to review key routes.

3. Site Accessibility and Road Safety

The aim of the Strategy is to enhance the visitor experience for the tens of thousands of school-children, students, walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and others who visit the Forest. The roads need to be made more Forest-centric and the provision of new, clear, safe crossing points appropriate to the rural Forest character will be a step in this direction. Actions and measures being considered include:

- ❑ **Speed Limits.** A review of speed limits throughout the Forest area, especially Rangers Road (A1069) and Bury Road, Chingford where measures will be considered jointly by Essex County Council and the London Borough of Waltham Forest.
- ❑ **Crossing islands.** Provision of carefully-designed traffic islands is proposed at key locations, including the A104, A121, and A1069, to assist walkers, cyclists and horse riders crossing the roads and to slow traffic speeds at these points. In addition to the islands anti-skid surfacing would be provided on the approaches to allow safer braking by vehicles. Such islands would be designed to fit in with the surrounding Forest landscape.
- ❑ **Technology.** Where appropriate the use of speed-activated signs warning drivers of pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders. The potential use of Average Speed cameras will also be investigated.
- ❑ **Junction layouts.** A review of junction layouts where appropriate to reduce congestion and its associated air pollution and to improve safety.

4. Road Signage

Many drivers passing through the Forest will be unaware they are travelling through a special area. It is important therefore that the signage reflects this and that the signs themselves are as far as possible in keeping with the rural nature of the surrounding Forest Land. Key measures could include:

- ❑ **Alternative sign design.** Developing innovative signage (e.g. wooden speed limit repeater signs to replace metal signs) specific to the Forest and based on gateway designs to ensure a single Forest “image/brand” throughout the road network.
- ❑ **Fewer signs.** Reducing sign clutter as part of the signage reviews and using zones wherever possible.
- ❑ **Sign condition.** Reviewing the condition, effectiveness and safety of existing road signs.
- ❑ **Sign replacement.** Drawing up and implementing a replacement schedule, as appropriate.
- ❑ **Brown tourist signs.** Reviewing the signing to Forest destinations, including consideration of the use of the brown tourist signs.

5. Sustainable Transport

It is important to make more sustainable transport options as attractive as possible both for existing users, and to encourage new visitors who may be able to travel in this way if the infrastructure were to be provided. Key measures could include:

- ❑ **The horse-riding network.** The Transport Strategy will consider ways of improving the safety of all equestrians. This includes consideration of the use of Pegasus crossings and other innovations for crossing points described above (see crossing points identified in Figures 2 and 3). The strategy would place emphasis on providing better and safer links to sites like the Lea Valley and the Essex and London bridleway networks to allow larger horse-riding circuits. Linked with this the amenity value will be maintained especially on key routes for the horse riders in the formulation of the proposals.
- ❑ **Cycle networks.** Essex County Council and the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest and Redbridge would work with the Conservators to improve the access to the Forest by bicycle, especially for less experienced riders such as children. Schools within the Forest could benefit if these improvements were also linked to “safer routes for schools” projects. Some work is already in progress with the London Boroughs and a submission of possible cycle route improvements has been made to Transport for London (TfL) in autumn 2008.
- ❑ **Road closures.** Combining both of the above objectives would be the conversion of roads to traffic-free bridleways and cycle routes through the potential closure of minor roads e.g. Fairmead Road, and Wake Road in Essex (see Figure 2). These examples provide an excellent opportunity to extend the options for access in the northern part of the Forest. The road network around High Beach will also be assessed in this context.
- ❑ **Car-free access.** These historical routes could form part of a car-free network. Together with “quiet lanes” (see section 2 above) or traffic-calmed roads elsewhere across the Forest these could considerably enhance the opportunities for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders to access the Forest, especially those with less experience (e.g. children). The Fairmead Road cycle route could provide enhanced north-south links with the Connaught Water car park, which in turn could link to other existing cycle routes in the London Borough network. Where dedicated cycle routes are not possible a signage strategy directing cyclists along quiet routes would be considered.

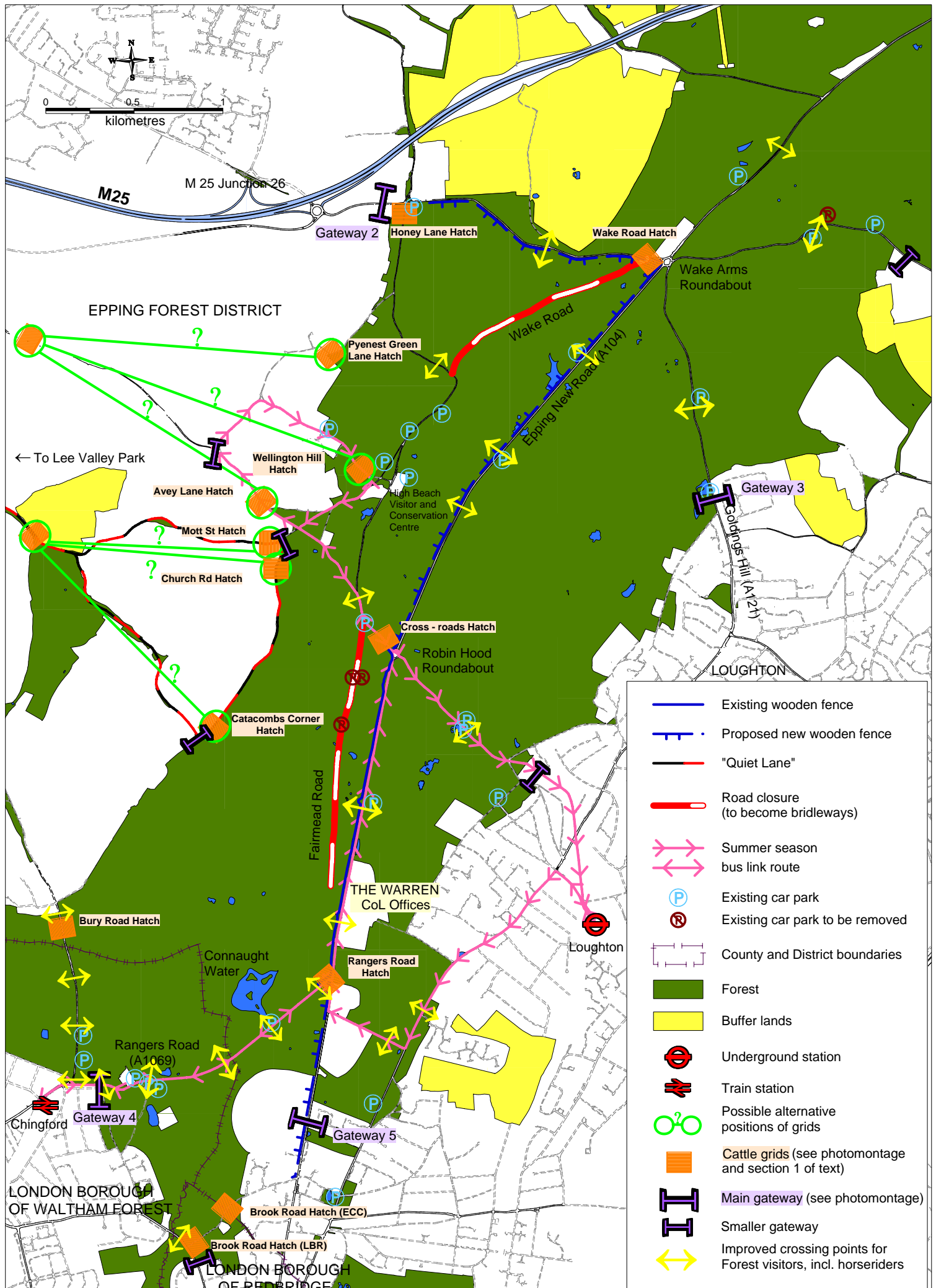


- ❑ **‘Hubs’**. Development of Sustainable Transport Hubs to provide convenient interchanges especially between rail, cycling and walking. These could be located at the local rail stations and extend to key areas in the Forest, including the Conservation Centre and the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge.
- ❑ **Information about access**. Provision of information boards, signage and leaflets at railway and bus stations to provide clear direction to the Forest and to encourage people to discover the Forest by public transport.
- ❑ **Storage facilities for bikes**. Cycle storage in-keeping with the forest environment would be considered at the transport hubs and Forest centres and cycle-hire facilities could become an off-shoot of such an initiative.



- ❑ **Public transport**. Sustainable east-west links across the Forest are a key element that needs to be developed for public transport, for example, through the provision of a peak-season shuttle bus service (see Figure 2). This among other ideas would be considered in order to link Chingford and Loughton to High Beach and the Forest, providing a key link to other public transport at Loughton Underground Station (Central Line) and Chingford National Rail Station (National Express services). Such a service could also call at the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge and the Epping Forest Conservation Centre. Public transport in the Essex area of the Forest is limited, and such a scheme, if viable, would provide a sustainable inter-urban link from the surrounding towns to this special area.

Figure 2: Proposed Transport Measures for the Epping Forest Transport Strategy



- Existing wooden fence
- Proposed new wooden fence
- "Quiet Lane"
- Road closure (to become bridleways)
- Summer season bus link route
- Existing car park
- Existing car park to be removed
- County and District boundaries
- Forest
- Buffer lands
- Underground station
- Train station
- Possible alternative positions of grids
- Cattle grids (see photomontage and section 1 of text)
- Main gateway (see photomontage)
- Smaller gateway
- Improved crossing points for Forest visitors, incl. horseriders

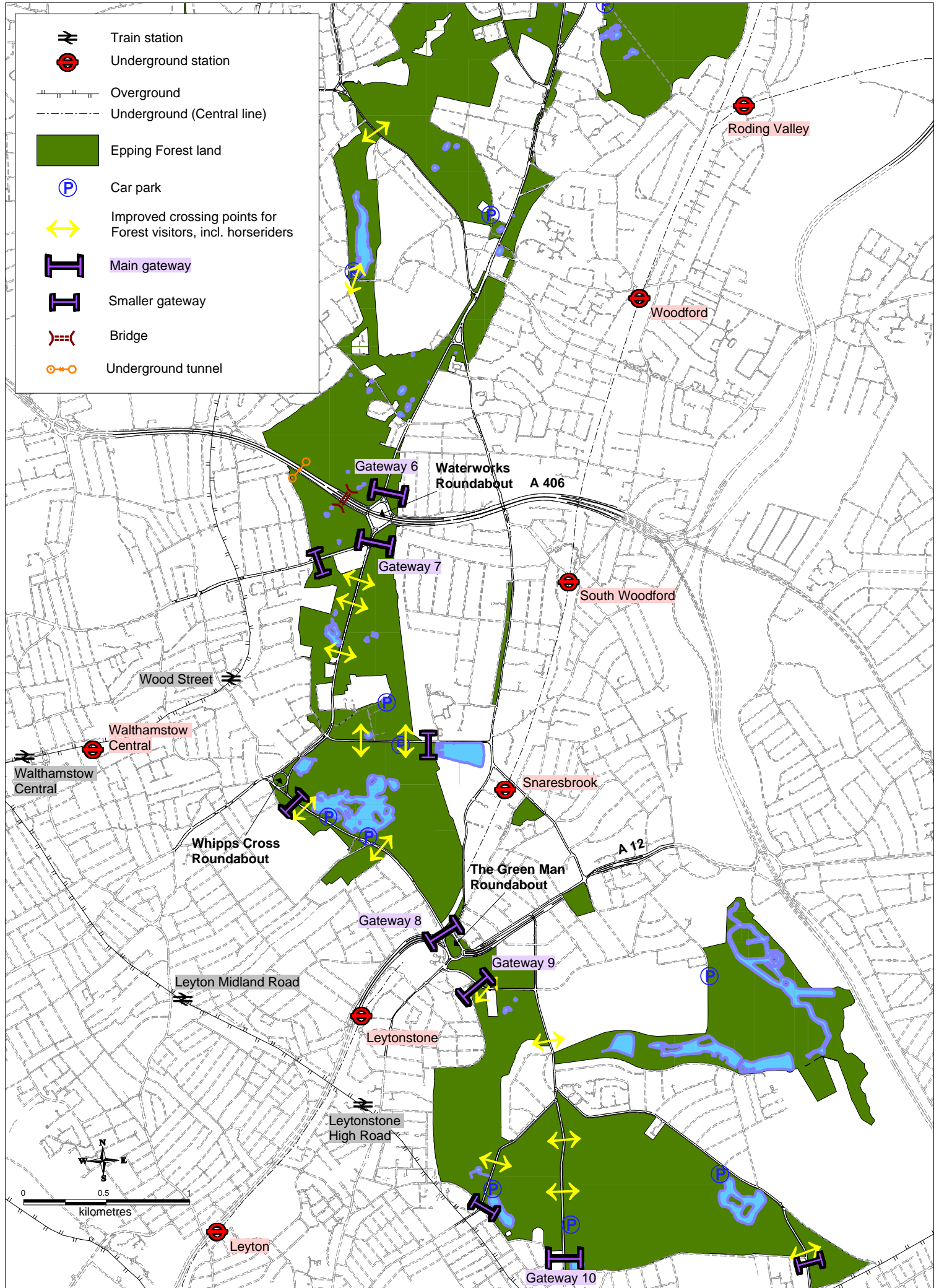
6. Specific London Borough measures

Many of the above proposals address issues that are specific to the more rural Essex portion of Epping Forest and ideas on these are further advanced than in the London part of the Forest. The aim of the Forest Transport Strategy is to encourage more ideas to be generated and to ensure stronger links are maintained between local authorities and the Conservators in decision-making on transport provision in and around the Forest.

In the London Boroughs the pressures of urban and sub-urban development are already present. The Forest landscape is more fragmented and pollution is even more of a problem. However, with these problems there are also considerable opportunities. There is greater public transport provision and this provides opportunities to visitors to gain access to the Forest by foot or bicycle without using the car or the roads. There are also huge educational opportunities if access can be made easier and more information is provided. Finally, if the roads can be made safer and more Forest-centric then children are more likely to use the Forest as a place to play, a basic need which is often considered under threat.

- ❑ **'Gateways'**. Gateways will be as important on the urban road network as on the faster trunk road network in Essex (see Figure 3 below).
- ❑ **Forest specific signage**. There is great scope to improve the signage around the Forest and to reduce the urbanising impact of roads on the Forest landscape. In particular, the provision of better-designed wooden signage that matches the overall Forest gateways design will change the look of the Forest roads and make a clearer statement to road users about the special landscape in which they are travelling.
- ❑ **Safer crossing points**. The horse-riding network in the London area of the Forest, although largely unsurfaced, is well-used and extensive. The improvement of crossing points is an important part of this strategy as described above and illustrated on Figures 2 and 3.
- ❑ **Cycle network**. There is scope for linking the London cycling network with the Forest in a way that encourages better access to the Forest and more recreational routes for families whilst protecting the Forest landscape and habitats. Ideas are already under consideration and this Strategy aims to ensure an integrated and sensitive approach with the local authorities, TfL and the Conservators working together.
- ❑ **Information provision on public transport**. The provision of information at public transport hubs should be an important part of the Transport Strategy action in the London boroughs.

Figure 3: Proposed crossings and gateways in London area of Epping Forest



The Way Forward

The proposed measures identified in this strategy are clearly funding-dependent (see Figures 2 and 3 above for maps of proposals). There will need to be resources allocated to the subsequent years of the Essex Local Transport Plan to progress the schemes when viable. Essex County Council will support the Conservators' submission of the HLF bid as well as work with the Conservators to develop the Epping Forest Transport Strategy, which will fit into the following timetable:

- Complete consultations on Transport Strategy with the Conservators (November 2008).
- Public Consultation (from November 2008).
- Design of initial schemes in latter part of the 2008-09 financial year.
- Decision by Heritage Lottery Fund on funding for "hubs", gateways and cattle grids (2009).
- Implementation from 2009 onwards dependent upon funding availability.

Further Information

Useful Links

City of London Corporation
& Conservators of Epping Forest

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk

Essex County Council

www.essex.gov.uk

London Borough of Redbridge

www.redbridge.gov.uk

London Borough of Waltham Forest

www.walthamforest.gov.uk



Essex County Council

